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SUBJECT: AFGHANISTAN/COUNTERNARCOTICS: BURN POPPY BURN

Classified By: E. Anthony Wayne for Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: On 21 July, Minister of Counternarcotics (CN), Khodaidad Khodaidad, Deputy Minister of Interior for CN, Mohammad Daud, and the Governor of Helmand, Gulab Mangal joined Embassy Kabul Coordinating Director for Development and Economic Affairs (CDDEA), Ambassador Wayne at Safar village, Garmser District of Helmand Province to supervise the destruction of over 290 tons of poppy seed and 16,000 liters of precursor chemicals seized by the Afghan National Counternarcotics Police (CNPA) in conjunction with the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and U.S. Marines. In press conferences at the site, the Afghans were able to tout their success working with the U.S. and the U.S. was able to highlight the U.S. CN strategy that focuses more resources on interdiction to deny the insurgents a ready source of funds and targets USG-funded programs to encourage and support the planting of alternative licit crops. SRAP Ambassador Holbrooke delivered a similar message during his subsequent visits to Helmand and Kabul.

¶2. (C) During the trip, Deputy Minister Daud expressed his concern about Afghan President Karzai's pardon of drug traffickers and the dire need to strengthen the CNPA outside of Kabul. END SUMMARY.

¶3. (SBU) During the nights of Jul 18 and 19, the CNPA raided two bazaars in Lakari and Safar villages in the Garmser district of Helmand Province. The CNPA, assisted by DEA and working in conjunction with U.S. Marines from the Second Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB), seized over 290 tons of poppy seed and over 16,000 liters of heroin processing precursor chemical acetic anhydride (the later with a street value of over \$8M USD) was discovered. They also seized lesser amounts of heroin, opium, and hash, as well as two functioning drug labs. Precursor chemicals and weapons to make IED's were also found in the bazaars.

¶4. (SBU) On 21 July, a delegation from Kabul, led by Minister of Counternarcotics Khodaidad, Deputy Minister of Interior Daud, and CDDEA, Ambassador Wayne traveled with press to Helmand Province to witness the destruction of the poppy seed and some others of the seized materials. They were met in Garmser district by Helmand Governor Mangal and embed journalists from CNN and the Washington Post, as well as a number of Afghan journalists. During the several press conferences on site, Deputy Minister Daud congratulated the CNPA and U.S. agencies and officially released the seizure totals. He pointedly commented on the seizure of IED material among the drugs, saying it reinforced the linkage between the insurgency and narcotrafficking.

¶5. (SBU) Governor Mangal expressed his satisfaction with the recent operations but cautioned that more needed to be done. He stressed that to get a permanent shift away from poppy cultivation, security had to improve and agricultural assistance needed to be provided. CDDEA, Ambassador Wayne

commented that the influx of U.S. marines was a first step in providing security for Helmand's citizens and that the new U.S. CN strategy would provide significant new resources for both alternative crop agricultural assistance and for interdiction. Success will require a joint U.S./Afghan effort, he said, and the close U.S.- Afghan cooperation demonstrated over the previous few days offered a positive sign on the way forward. After the press conference, participants watched as U.S. forces destroyed the seized material by calling in airstrikes from AH-1 Cobra gunships and Harrier jets. The event was filmed by local and international press and was aired for several days on Afghan TV.

¶16. (C) On the return trip, Deputy Minister Daud (protect) said President Karzai's recent decision to free five convicted traffickers had been a big psychological blow to him and his CNPA officers. Daud said he had conveyed his serious disagreement to the President, but more importantly, public reaction to the release had been uniformly negative. This negative popular reaction, Daud said, had forestalled further releases which were being prepared by the President's entourage and family members. Daud said he had heard that some members of the President's family had been receiving money from those seeking the pardon and release of convicted traffickers.

¶17. (C) Regarding his own forces, Daud said the CNPA was terribly weak and corrupt outside of the capital. There was a great need for training, better pay, and equipment. As a short term help, Daud hoped to turn part of the former Poppy Eradication Force (PEF) into a general counter drug force to perform a wide range of CN tasks and to send part of the force to work at the National Interdiction Unit. He said he hoped to send elements of the force to Helmand for several months to bolster security and help with anti-poppy information campaigns. Daud said he felt it was important for the Afghan government to make clear that it would continue to use sticks as well as carrots to fight poppy cultivation and that the destruction of poppy seed, chemicals, and drugs earlier in the day was in that sense a very good event.

¶18. (SBU) COMMENT: The recent seizures represent a significant blow to regional narcotraffickers and a signal that they can no longer act with impunity in the southern reaches of Helmand Province. The ability of senior Afghan officials to travel to the region to hold a press event also made clear that the security environment in Helmand is changing for the better and highlighted the ability of Afghan and coalition forces to conduct joint operations. It represents a win for the new U.S. counternarcotics strategy's focus on interdiction and will be followed by USG-funded programs to encourage and support the planting of alternative licit crops. SRAP Holbrooke delivered these messages clearly during his subsequent visit to the province.

EIKENBERRY